

A Framework for Selecting Change Strategies in IT Organizations

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Abstract. In this paper we describe a framework which combines several models for organizational change. The framework enables an organization to decide which strategies will be most successful when implementing a specific change in its particular setting. The conditions for change is assessed in relation to each of the strategies for organizational change and a list-of-fit is produced, which reveals the degree to which each of the strategies fits the specific setting. The framework was developed and evaluated within a field study involving four companies in the financial sector. The IT organizations in two of these collaborated with the researchers in providing promising evaluations of the framework.

1 Introduction

The Danish Talent@IT project [26] (www.talent-it.dk) studies parameters in organizations which promote or impede changes in organizations. This has led to a model of 20 parameters in 4 categories, the *ImprovAbility*TM model [20] (see Fig. 1). The *ImprovAbility*TM model and accompanying assessment method provides an organization with a view of their strengths and weaknesses on each of these parameters.

In addition, the project studies different change approaches [25] and their relevance for improving each of the parameters of the model. An *ImprovAbility*TM assessment therefore also produces recommendations for change approaches that can be used in the specific organizational setting to improve the success of its change efforts.

Our study of change approaches employed in practice by IT practitioners and their management lead us to distinguish three types: Means (methods, techniques, and tools), Approaches (principles, practices, or conducts), Strategies (overall rationale for how changes are perceived by the organization).

Means and Approaches belong to the operational level. The selection of a change strategy, however, belongs to the top level of the organization. It is heavily influenced by the vision or goals for the change as well as by issues in the organizational culture. These issues determine the conditions that make certain change strategies successful and others a failure. In this paper, we are concerned with the design and evaluation of a framework for change strategies and a tool, which enables organizations to select among those which will be most successful, and avoid those most probable to fail.

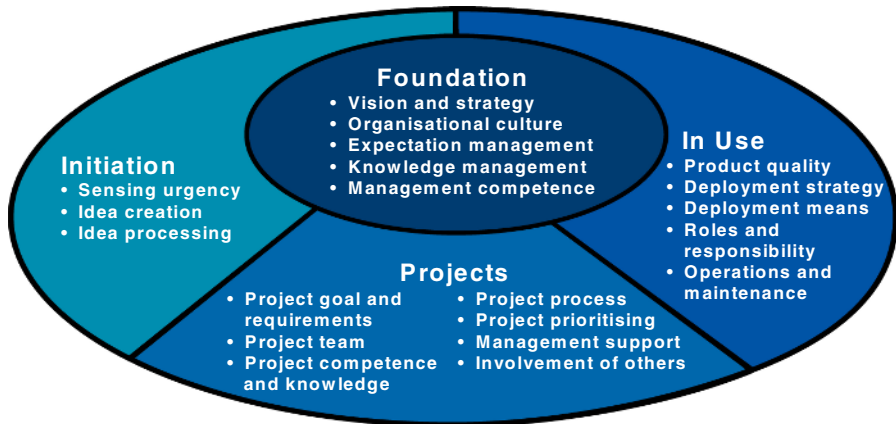


Fig. 1. The *ImprovAbility*™ model

2 Theories and Models for Organizational Change

Since management became a discipline, the study of change has been important. Authors have written about organizational change from different perspectives including psychology, sociology and business. Academic and practitioner contributions to organizational change have been built on empirical work in many organizations. Examples of this include descriptive accounts of change, normative models to guide change processes, theoretical models for understanding and analyzing change, typologies of approaches to organizational change, and empirical studies of success and failure.

In terms of the descriptive accounts of change, three different schools of organizational thinking have provided metaphors for organizations. The first school (and oldest) descends back to the end of the 19th century where Taylor, Fayol, and Weber were key figures. Taylor invented “Scientific Management” including the key belief that “it is possible and desirable to establish, through methodological study and the application of scientific principles, the one best way of carrying out any job.” ([6], p. 28). The metaphor for this is an organization as a production system where it is possible to optimize its efficiency and effectiveness. Organizational change is about optimizing planning through observation, experimentation, calculation and analysis.

In the 1930s and 1940s the second school challenged the classical view of organizations to provide a new perspective. In relation to change this perspective is characterized by [6][4] the belief that organizations are co-operative, social systems rather than mechanical ones, where people seek to meet their emotional needs. So the metaphor for an organization is a (large) group of people with an organizational culture and visible communication and interaction processes between them.

The 3rd school of thought has been called the political-emergent perspective [6][4]. It is characterized by the belief that organizations and change are shaped by the interests and commitments of individuals. It is also characterized by the belief that decisions often arise from power-struggles between special-interest groups or coalitions. “Organizations are not machines, even though some of those running them would dearly like them to be so. They are communities of people, and therefore behave just